

**Testimony in Support of LD 1466**  
**An Act to Address Severe and Ongoing Shortfalls in the Funding of Direct Care**  
**Workers in Long-term Care Settings and to Establish the Commission to Study**  
**Long-term Care Workforce Issues**

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Good afternoon Senator Brakey and Representative Hymanson and members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of LD 1466, An Act to Address Severe and Ongoing Shortfalls in the Funding of Direct Care Workers in Long-term Care Settings and to Establish the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.

My name is Sandy Butler. I live in Orono and am a Professor of Social Work at the University of Maine. My concern for the work conditions of direct care workers grew out of two of my primary areas of interest and research: first, the well-being of older adults; and second, women's financial security across the life-span. I have conducted numerous studies over the past 15 years related to long-term care, assessing both the experiences of those receiving supports and services and those providing them.

I would like to speak with you briefly about the findings from my primary study on this topic, a longitudinal inquiry regarding the experiences of home care workers—called Personal Support Specialists in Maine—and factors causing them to leave their jobs.

Turnover is an expensive problem throughout the long-term care system. Perhaps the greatest costs are those borne by frail elders through disrupted or nonexistent care. But the costs also include increased stress for other workers who are left to fill in extra shifts and duties, as well as the financial costs to employers to recruit and train new workers. In a tight labor market, without more competitive wages and benefits, finding these workers becomes even more difficult. Nationally, average annual turnover rates for home care workers range from 44% to 64% (Seavey & Marquand, 2011), and in my study of 261 home care workers in Maine, over a third—90 workers—left during the 18-month study period.

We interviewed these 90 home care workers, soon after they terminated, to learn why they had left. Like those who stayed, most of these workers loved the work they were doing, they just could not afford to continue due to low pay, too few hours, lack of health insurance, and unreimbursed mileage. I have attached an article to my testimony that draws from the study findings and includes many quotes from Maine home care aides regarding these compensation issues.

What became evident to me, as I interviewed home care workers in this study, is that they are very dedicated to their clients and most would like to remain in the work if they could. Raising wages is key to making it possible for many of these workers to remain in this job they love. But there are also other issues to address, such as providing adequate training and incentives for job advancement; and assuring access to health insurance, paid

sick leave, adequate hours, and consistent supervision. The Commission proposed in this bill would be tasked to explore these critical issues.

The need for direct care workers is increasing rapidly. The home care workforce has doubled in the past decade. Personal care aides and home health aides comprise the fastest growing occupation in the U.S. (PHI, 2016). With 10,000 Americans turning 65 each day, we know this demand is not going to let up any time soon. About one-third of people 65 and older, and two thirds of people 85 and older, experience functional limitations that require some form of assistance (Marquand & York, 2016). Many will receive that assistance from family and friends but many others will need the assistance provided by paid direct care workers, either at home, or if necessary, in skilled nursing facilities. If we value our elders, we need to value those who care for them. LD 1466 provides an important step toward doing just that.

Thank you Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, and members of the committee for giving LD 1466 the attention it deserves. We cannot afford to ignore the existing care gap in our state; we must improve the job conditions and opportunities for direct care workers. I urge you to support LD 1466. I would be happy to take any questions you may have at this time.

### **References**

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- Seavey, D. & Marquand, A. (2011). *A caring America: A comprehensive analysis of the nation's fastest growing jobs: Home health and personal care aides*. New York: PHI.